

NATIONAL LEAD POISONING AWARENESS WEEK OCTOBER 19 –25, 2003

Before we realized how harmful it could be, lead was used in paint, gasoline, water pipes, and many other common products. As a result, hazardous levels of lead can be found in the dust of some homes, in paint, in soil, in drinking water, and in some dishes and pottery. Some folk remedies such as “azarcon” and “greta” used to treat indigestion or upset stomach are composed of lead oxides and can cause massive exposures.

Children ages 1 year through 6 years are at the greatest risk for lead poisoning. This is due to their low body weight and developing organs and nervous system. Pregnant women and their unborn babies are also at high risk because a pregnant woman’s body absorbs more lead. Even a small amount of lead can be harmful. Low levels of lead can cause problems with learning, hearing, growth, and behavior. High levels of lead can cause serious brain damage, convulsions, coma, and even death.

Lead paint in older homes is the most common source of lead poisoning. Dust from peeling paint or remodeling can get on a child’s hands, toys, or other objects that a child puts in their mouth. Dust from leaded paint can also contaminate the soil around older homes.

Lead exposed children often show no symptoms at all, even at somewhat elevated levels. The only way to know if a child has been exposed to lead somewhere in their environment is to have their blood lead level tested. This test is done with a simple finger prick test. Blood lead levels are measured in weight per volume. A blood lead level of 10 micrograms per deciliter is considered to be “lead poisoning”.

The Arizona Screening Coalition and the Arizona Department of Health Services recommend the screening of all children six years of age and younger. However, lead screening is not a standard part of well-child examinations. Screening is only mandatory for children enrolled in Medicaid/AHCCCS. If you have a child under six, ask your doctor for a lead test and to explain the results to you.

Ways to protect your child from lead:

- Do not remove any lead paint yourself. Sanding or scraping lead-based paint may contaminate your home further. Homes built before 1978 may contain lead-based paint.
- Do not use azarcon, greta or other folk remedies that contain lead. Do not allow healers or other family members to give your children these powders. The powders are usually mixed with olive oil and are given to the child by spoon.

- Do not use imported, old, or handmade pottery for cooking or storing food or beverages unless you are certain that it does not contain lead.
- Keep your home as dust-free and clean as possible, especially where children play. Wet mop floors and wipe windowsills and cribs with warm soapy water.
- Do not let children eat dirt. Do not let them eat food that has fallen on the ground.
- Have children play in clean sand or in grassy areas. Bare soil may contain lead, the soil sticks to fingers and toys.
- Wash children's hands often, especially before eating and sleeping and after playing outside. Wash toys and pacifiers often.
- Feed children foods that are high in iron and calcium. Avoid high fat junk foods such as chips and candy. A healthy diet helps the body to absorb less lead.
- Do not bring lead dust home from work. If you work with lead, shower and change into clean clothes and shoes before leaving the workplace. Wash work clothes separately from other laundry. Wipe your feet before entering the home.
- Ask your child's doctor for a blood lead test.

For more information on lead poisoning prevention contact the Arizona Department of Health Services toll-free at 1-800-367-6412 or go to:

<http://www.hs.state.az.us/phs/oeh/invSurv/lead/chleadmain.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/events/leadWeek.htm>

<http://www.hud.gov/offices/lead/>

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/HomeRemedies.pdf>

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